Beyond the Blame, the Light of the Flame

(Average reading time: 7 minutes)

> ***Let me be clear: this article is not Daʿwah*** *(invitation to the Islam).*
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> *It is not about calling people to become Muslim. This is a* ***health-related*** *article, pure and simple. Nevertheless, I find great beauty and clarity in the Islamic terms I grew up with, and I believe they add a linguistic and spiritual dimension that enriches the way we talk about* ***health.***
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> *That is why I use them here, as I do with all of my articles.*

Have you ever paused to consider what we are truly doing to our children in this world of *endless* routines and *constant* comparisons? Every day, we usher them into classrooms and fill their minds with information they *never* asked for, facts and figures that *often* have *little* to do with the lives they dream of living. We tell them it is important. We insist it is everything. Then we line them up and demand they pour it all out onto a blank page in just a few hours.

We take those hasty scribbles and measure them *against* the work of every other child *their* age. They stand there, eyes downcast, holding their breath as they await the *final* verdict. Some of them are told they are the *winners*. The rest are made to feel they are *not good enough*!

By the way, this is **not** an argument against grading or pursuing a degree. Seeking beneficial knowledge—*ʿIlm Nāfiʿ* (beneficial knowledge)—has always been valued in our traditions. Grades have their place, and so does striving for excellence—*al-Iḥsān* (the highest level of excellence in every deed). The trouble begins when those grades become the *only* story that matters, when they *overshadow everything* else and drown out what it means to be *healthy* and *whole*.

Moreover, I am certainly **not** against memorization either. *Ḥifẓ* (memorization) has a treasured place in our culture and traditions. It is a practice that anchors us to our roots and our faith. I have seen how memorizing even a few lines of *Qurʾān* or a single *Ḥadīth* (Prophetic narration) can shape a person's heart and character. However, I have also seen that it is not merely about how much you memorize. It is about how you live those words. Some memorize only a handful of lines and live them with *Ikhlāṣ* (sincerity), while others might memorize *entire* volumes yet struggle to put that knowledge into practice with *Ādāb* (refined manners and conduct).

This is not about memorization itself. It is about finding *Mīzān* (balance) in our approach. Our children's health—*ʿĀfiyah* (holistic well-being, free from harm)—should always be at the center of how we approach learning. **That is what compels me to write this**. Because right now, far too many children are crumbling under the weight of it all. **Anxiety**—the constant tightening in the chest, the breath that feels too shallow—creeps in like an unwelcome guest. **Depression** follows, sapping their energy and draining away their smiles. **Burnout**, once reserved for adults, now stalks children as young as twelve. **Twelve**! In fact, there are many teenagers considering committing suicide! They lose the bright spark in their eyes, but they keep going because they do not know what else to do.

Some retreat inward, folding themselves away like flowers at night. And what do we do? We put a label on them, send them to therapy, or hand them pharmaceutical drugs, as if they themselves are the problem and not the world that is crushing them. We tell them to toughen up, never daring to ask whether the system itself is what is broken, not the child.

What if we found the courage to see beyond the numbers and rankings? What if we could see children as children again, not as machines designed for endless repetition? Imagine the freedom they

would feel. The lives they could build if we only let them dream. Let that question stay with you: what if we chose to see beyond?

Imagine a world where we allow children to be children. Where we nurture their natural curiosity—*Fiṭrah* (the pure, unspoiled state of the human soul)—instead of stifling it with endless drills and rehearsed answers. Where we teach them ***how*** to think through *Tadabbur* (deep reflection and contemplation), not just ***what*** to think. Picture a classroom filled with laughter and wonder, where excitement is a sign that real *Taʿallum* (learning) is taking root.

These children, bright and curious, want more than just memorization and mechanical routines. They want to feel the thrill of a question in their chest and to follow it into new discoveries. They want to see how *ʿIlm* (knowledge) and *Ḥikmah* (wisdom) come together in daily life, how even the story of a single leaf can hold a lesson that no textbook ever captured, how the crackling of a campfire can spark a lifelong love for the natural world and the signs of the Creator.

For that to happen, we have to let go of the idea that children are empty containers to be filled. They are *Bustān* (lush gardens), waiting for the gentle hand of a gardener who understands the rhythm of life. They need an environment that cherishes their individual growth and their unique gifts.

When we force them to measure up to someone else's yardstick, we steal away the joy of learning for its own sake. We replace wonder with worry, exploration with expectation. And when they collapse under that weight, it is not because they are fragile or flawed. It is because they are *Bashar* (human beings), beautifully and messily human, created with hearts meant to remember Allāh.

So what if we chose a different way? What if we moved from control to *Raḥmah* (mercy and compassion), from competition to *Ukhuwwah*

(brotherhood)? What if we taught them to value kindness over comparisons, to see mistakes not as failures but as stepping stones, like the examples of the prophets and the stories in the *Qurʾān*? Imagine the quiet confidence that grows when a child knows they are more than a number on a page.

We could show them that their worth is not tied to test scores, but to the light, they bring to the *Ummah* (the global Muslim community). We could teach them that *Ṣabr* (patience and perseverance) does not come from constant pressure, but from knowing they are safe to stumble and rise again, safe to learn and grow with *Tawakkul* (reliance on Allāh and trust in His plan).

Because it was never about raising perfect children. It has always been about raising whole children. Children who know how to think, how to feel, how to live as *Khulafāʾ* (caretakers and stewards of the earth). Children who understand that the world is wide and full of *Ayāt* (signs of Allāh), and that they have a purpose and a place in it.

However, if we continue down this path of poisoning them with junk food, pharmaceutical drugs, lack of empathy and appreciation, and if we only see their weak points and force them to earn a degree no matter the cost—even if it means setting aside their values or compromising *their* health—then we should not be surprised when they suffer from multiple mental breakdowns. Let us not forget that these children are an *Amānah* (sacred trust) from Allāh. If we keep squandering their *mental* and *physical* health, we will pay a heavy price for it, both literally and figuratively.

Maybe, just maybe, in choosing to see beyond, we would learn to see ourselves again—not as mere little wheels in the machinery of this world, but as souls created to reflect the wisdom and beauty of our Creator.

I pray that we will rectify ourselves for the better. We have a long and painstaking road ahead, as we must get rid of so much ***unhealthy*** baggage from our own youth, upbringing, and the past in general, and our environment.

Wallāhu al-Muwaffiq (And Allāh is the One Who Grants Success).

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